♦ **Social issues addressed at the protocol level.** Widespread use of the Internet has far-reaching effects on intellectual property rights, privacy protection, and data filtering. Exploring how these concerns might be addressed at the protocol level—through policies, rules, and conventions for the exchange and use of information—could be a promising approach to addressing issues arising from the use of new computer and communications technology. Examples include the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS)—which implements a set of protocols for rating Web sites—and P3P, a project for specifying privacy practices.

The NRC panel also identified ways to improve the data needed to study the economic and social effects of IT, such as making data related to the social and economic effects of computing and communications available to the research community through a clearinghouse; exploring ways for researchers to obtain access to private-sector data; and establishing stronger ties with industry associations to facilitate collaborative research.

Potential Information Technology Indices

Interconnectivity index. This index would provide a measure of the facility of electronic communication and an evaluation of the development of this dimension of the information infrastructure.

Information quality of life index. Similar to an index produced by OECD, this index would attempt to evaluate the qualitative levels of communication available to individuals.

Leading information indicators. This index would attempt to predict the growth of the information infrastructure.

Home media index. This index of the state of penetration of communications technologies in the home might qualify as a leading index of the potential for future consumption of information.

Marginalization index. This index would measure the extent to which specific populations are excluded from participation in the information infrastructure.

SOURCE: CSTB (1998).

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